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In this issue:

- Ray Kowalski Leaves FCC After 19 Years!

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o Ray Kowalski Leaves FCC After 19 Years!

Everyone is shocked at the sudden resignation of career government official Raymond A. Kowalski, who tendered his resignation last week and is leaving for a law position in the private sector. He told us that principles from a Washington legal firm walked into his office two weeks ago and made him an offer he could not refuse. "It is as simple as that," Ray said during a telephone interview held just before Christmas.

Kowalski was made Special Services Division Chief (which oversees that Amateur Radio Service) in June of 1982 when a reorganization of the FCC's Private Radio Bureau resulted in the creation of that division. Prior to that, Ray headed up the PRB's Compliance Division.

The chain of command at the FCC in Washington works something like this. Branch heads report to Divisions. Johnny Johnston, W3BE, Chief of the Personal Radio Branch, answers to the Special Services Division. The (Part 87) Aviation and (Part 80) Maritime Radio Services are also under the Special Services Division. Division Chiefs report to Bureau management.

Ralph Haller, N4RH and an engineer, had just been promoted during mid-December from Deputy to Chief of the FCC's Private Radio Bureau -- a position he had held for a year. Haller, who joined the FCC in 1971 as a radio inspector, was previously a broadcast engineer for a Kansas radio station. When he became PRB Acting Chief, Kowalski moved up to the Acting Deputy PRB Chief slot.

Everyone naturally figured that Haller and Kowalski would be the new Private Radio Bureau management team. The question being focused on was who might replace Ray as Division Chief. Roger Madden, an engineer and Kowalski's assistant, was the logical choice.

Kowalski leaving the FCC after nearly two decades is something of a bombshell! "I would not have left the Commission for a frivilous or even an equivalent position on the outside," he said. I have been offered something considerably more -- both in the immediate future as well as prospects and opportunities for beyond. That was my motivation in deciding to leave. It was a tough choice to case in nineteen FCC years."

A rumor had it that possibly Kowalski may have been passed over as Deputy Bureau Chief, but Ray said this was not the case. "I have every reason to believe that I would have been permanently promoted into that position," he said. "The (law firm) offer was so good that it didn't matter." Ray starts with the communications law firm of Blooston & Mordkofsky on January 4th.

When asked if he felt Madden would become the new Special Services Division Chief, Ray noted "When you get to the Division Chief level, it is not a matter of simple progression." Ray laughingly said that some of his views were not always shared by Madden. "He has some definite ideas about Amateur Radio."

I asked Ray about what he felt were the most significant amateur radio achievements during his five years as Special Services Division Chief. "Without a doubt," Ray said, "the two key things are the Volunteer Examination System and Novice Enhancement."

Ray said he was not as optimistic about the volunteer examining as he had been previously. "I think we are going into a critical phase of the program," he said. "The amateurs responded so well to the initiation of the program. Volunteer Examiner Coordinators came forward. Amateurs joined up to be volunteer examiners. At first there were some administrative glitches. Now the administrative system is working very well. From that standpoint, the VE/VEC system has been a huge success."

"Now we are getting into the phase where people are beginning to test the program and that happens whether or not the government is running the system or volunteers are running it. It is not a function of who is running it. It is only a function of the program. We know from running systems over the years that you go through this phase where people will test the system and get what they are not entitled to. That is what we are seeing now in various parts of the country. I don't think one part of the country is unique. We are going to see similar instances popping up probably in a half a dozen places over the next year to year-and-a-half."

"Efforts have to be redoubled as far as the integrity of the VE/VEC system goes, because what you find is that people have interpretations of what does this mean. There is a certain mind-set out there that is sometimes even shared among the test givers, that 'if you beat the system you are beating the FCC.' Well, that is not the case. You are not beating the FCC, you are beating Amateur Radio. That is what the volunteer examination program is facing today. It is a natural function of programs that people out there will try to beat any system. The next year or so will be critical to the permanence and staying power of the VE/VEC program."

I mentioned that the next VEC Conference would be held in Dallas during the HamCom Convention and that perhaps the VEC's could contribute toward brining key FCC personnel to that meeting. Ray said that "In terms of the FCC's budget, 1988 shapes up not only as a lean year, but an austere year to the point where there will be virtually no domestic travel. This is going to be a very difficult year from the point of view of our being able to get out into the real world and discussing amateur issues. Even though a travel expense is reimbursed, we still have to budget it as though it were coming out of our own budget."

We also discussed a "non-event" during Ray's watch -- that being the Docket 20282 'No-Code' proceeding of the early 1980's.

"Being an attorney, I can professionally argue either side of any issue," Ray told us. "During the internal debates during that subject, I was assigned the task of arguing the side in favor of 'no-code'."

I asked Ray what were some of the points he made: "I discussed the actual practical use that Morse is used in the service today, ...the technological equivalents that exist in terms of code readers and keyboards, ...the fact that if you stop and analyze the actual emergency traffic that takes place during earthquakes, volcanoes and other natural disasters -- folks are really using code, ...they are using packet and voice."

"I analogized it to computers where you don't have to know a lick of programming in order to be able to skillfully and beneficially use a computer. Similarly, you don't have to know a lick of Morse code in order to skillfully operate an amateur radio station. And if you have need to copy a Morse transmission, you can buy a keyboard/reader. These are some of the points that I argued. That doesn't necessarily mean that I felt them personally."

I asked Ray exactly how does he feel about a beginning no-code ham license. He hesitated what seemed an unusually long while. "I have long felt that Morse is an important part of the Amateur Radio tradition. I don't know that I would necessarily have so much of my Amateur Service program keyed ... no pun intended ... around Morse ... determining every privilege and every rank in the service. But I do feel that there ought to be a mandatory exposure to Morse ...if for nothing else than to carry on that tradition ...and to make sure that the capability lives on."

Kowalski said that the two principle Amateur Radio matters his office had been involved in recently had been "put to bed" and were awaiting their regulatory turn for a Commission ruling. "You can expect to see something on a rewrite of the Part 97 rules about the beginning of March. PRB-3 (amateur call signs of choice) will come up shortly afterwards -- more to the middle of Spring." (The 220-222 MHz issue is not a Private Radio Bureau matter. It has its roots in the FCC's Office of Engineering and Technology.)

We personally will miss Ray. He always had time to talk to us and to give us an opinion or an update. Kowalski will long be remembered as being very responsive to Amateur Radio and its needs. "Over the years, people may have disagreed with some of the things I have said and done but no one can say that I haven't cared about Amateur Radio."

Ray said that he felt that the FCC's involvement in Amateur Radio would proceed on pretty much an even keel. "My own individual voice and judgement of things has never been the last word on anything around here. I would not

expect anyone else in my position will have a noticeable degree of difference in the outcome.

Ray lives in the Washington, DC suburb of Vienna, Virginia. He and his wife, Jean Ann, have three children, Jenifer, 16, Jason, 13 and Amanda, 8. We wish him well in his new position.

[End this issue]